NOW WHAT?

kidscreen

DECEMBER 2010

'S FOCUS ON PRODUCTION SERVICES

STARZ ANIMATION TORONTO

CANADA'S LEADING INDEPENDENT CG ANIMATION STUDIO

GNOMEO & JULIET
February 11, 2011
From Touchstone Pictures
and Entertainment One
Animated at Starz Animation Toronto

FEATURES SERIES VISUAL EFFECTS STEREOSCOPIC

starz
ANIMATION Toronto

starzanimation.com - sat.info@starz.com - 416.682.5260

NOW WHAT? CONTENTS

DECEMBER 2010

EDITOR'S NOTE

We all know the whole is only as good as the sum of its parts, and that adage certainly holds true when it comes to children's entertainment. While getting a series greenlit continues to be challenging, arguably the real panic sets in when a producer sits back with presales and a delivery schedule in-hand and thinks, "Eek! Now What? Where do I start to pull it all together?"

Well, it certainly takes more than one talented team to shepherd a production from scripting through to the final edit, and the project can go off the rails at any point in between if one's service providers aren't a good fit or don't deliver on their promises. So with that in mind, *KidScreen* decided to shine the spotlight on the behind-the-scenes companies that often play an integral part in bringing the final product to life.

Delving into some of the key services employed by kids TV producers, *Now What? KidScreen's Focus on Production Services* offers solid, forward-looking overviews of the Animation, Talent, Audio, Post, Interactive and Distribution sectors. For seasoned producers, it's a chance to do some comparison shopping. And for those newer to fold, it should provide leads and a bit of direction.

We're planning on making this special issue an annual feature of *KidScreen*'s editorial calendar. So read on and let me know what you think. I'm already starting to gather ideas for next year's edition.

Cheers and Happy New Year,

Lana

G·D·C

Global Digital Creations Holdings Limited

CUSTOMER ENDORSEMENTS

"Working with GDC for the past five years has been incredibly rewarding. Innovative and creative, they've done a fantastic job on every project we've collaborated on."

 --- **MOONSCOOP LLC**

"GDC is a great studio that can deliver high quality animation within a tight schedule. Their team is a pleasure to work with, too. That quality has seen "Enyo" win the Australian Effects and Animation award for TV Series and be nominated for an AFI (Australian Film Institute) award for Best Children's Television Animation."

--- **Flying Bark Productions**

"Your CG animation on our new Strawberry Shortcake entertainment is outstanding! Strawberry is looking more adorable than ever !"

--- **American Greetings Properties**

"little tikes" **little tikes LAND**
55 minutes DVDs

"Bratz"
Bratz really
26 x 22 minutes TV series and 8 DVDs

"Enyo" won an AEAF Award for Animated TV series
Legend of Enyo
IN A PARALLEL LAND, IN A FARAWAY TIME WORLD OF NEW
26 x 11 minutes TV series

"Strawberry Shortcake"
Strawberry Shortcake
26 x 22 minutes TV series and 3 Direct to Home Films

"Lionelville"
Lionelville
66 minutes Direct to Home Films

"Dive Olly Dive" 2008 Winner of a Parents' Choice Approved Award
dive Olly dive
Two seasons of 26 x 22 minutes TV series and 90 minutes theatrical film

"Thru the Moebius Strip" 2006 China Animation Association the Judges' Special Award
MOEBIUS STRIP GDC
95 minutes theatrical film

"The legend of Shangri-La" Tokyo Broadcasting System 'DIGICON 6+2 Grand Prize Winner
桃花源记

ANIMATION

Pipeline progress

BY WENDY GOLDMAN GETZLER

Animation service centers in Asia, India and emerging regions like Africa and the Caribbean have developed a reputation over the past few years for offering reliable, lower-cost work, but Western–based studios are now rising to the challenge. And as both sides endeavor to keep on top of ever-evolving animation trends, we asked producers and service providers to sound off on what they're currently seeing in the animation work-for-hire space and where the future of the trade is headed.

Weighing the options

With so many components involved in an animated project—from design and storyboarding through to animation and output—Toronto, Canada-based Skywriter Media & Entertainment CEO Kevin Gillis says many producers look to keep the outsourced components under one roof to make the production process as cohesive as possible.

Technological enhancements that have transformed the industry over the past 10 years have gone a long way towards facilitating this cohesion and driving a significant drop in work-for-hire prices. For example, 2-D software like Toon Boom now permits the instant transmission of work via the web, tightening up the feedback loop.

"The ability for directors and producers to see the final product and make changes is now on an overnight basis as compared to a weekly one," says Gillis.

Animation service work often eats up more than half of a TV toon's production budget, but the good news is innovative service providers are keeping costs down while moving tech forward

"This speeds things up in terms of production time and keeps the momentum up for the animator." (Still, Gillis says the internet can't replace face-to-face collaboration and recommends that studios send an animation director to the service facility for the first few months of production.)

Cookie Jar Entertainment's president and COO Toper Taylor, who's based in L.A., agrees that on top of cost and creative capacity, what really sets a

service provider apart is the level of compatibility between the animation studio and the producer.

"Your confidence needs to be in the hands of the animators, and in the price they are doing it for," says Taylor. "The advent of computers and software like Toon Boom actually made it less costly and more creatively efficient to make animation in the Western world," he adds.

It's a smaller world, after all

If the growing number of Toon Boom global licenses is any indication, the West hasn't entirely won over the animation production space. Toon Boom software, which enables animators to create 2-D and import 3-D objects and allows producers to utilize different types of styles and technologies through an open pipeline, is currently utilized in 122 countries. In bringing advanced animation techniques to a global clientele, tech like Toon Boom is leveling the playing field for emerging regions. In Africa and the Middle East, the software manufacturer has secured more than 5,000 professional licenses, more than 10,000 in Asia, 8,000 and counting in Europe, and 20,000-plus in North America.

"We're enabling more work-for-hire to happen globally," says Joan Vogelesang, Toon Boom president and CEO. "For producers who want to outsource, it makes things easier and for those who want to do more work in-house they can do so cost-effectively." With producers often using more than one studio internationally to take advantage of varying skill-sets and costs in particular geographical regions, Vogelesang says shared, standardized software provides the option to exercise these choices.

The company is currently seeing extreme growth in developing countries, particularly in India, China and Brazil. Also increasingly using the product are animation studios in the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East, which Vogelesang says are keeping pace with growing broadcasters and channels in the regions that are constantly looking for content.

"What's really getting interesting is that the quality is higher," says Vogelesang, adding that 2009 was the 15-year-old company's best year to date. "There was a lull with the recession, but North America is now coming along and other areas are moving very nicely."

In Canada, for one, the amount of animated output is hardly on the decline. The country produces more animated content for TV than anywhere else in the world, with 2008 stats showing 382 hours were produced on a budget of roughly US$265 million. According to Cookie Jar's Taylor, depending on the animation style chosen, it can cost between US$80,000 and US$150,000 to animate a 22-minute episode in Canada.

Compared to Asian service centers, Canadian pricing seems pretty hefty, unless the production in question originates in that country or qualifies as a treaty co-pro. More than half of Corus-owned Nelvana Studio's annual productions warrant work-for-hire and the Canadian company is able to carry out a lot of that work domestically thanks to local funding and tax credits. "Canada is such a huge place for funding opportunities, so not any one offshore provider has an advantage over local ones," says Luis Lopez, director of Nelvana Studio operations.
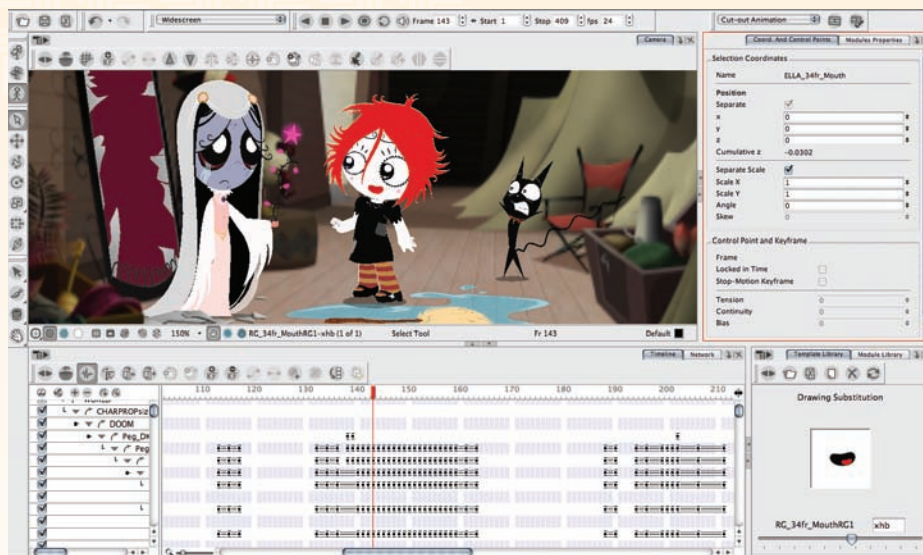
The growing ubiquity of standardized animation software like Toon Boom Harmony, which weaves various stages of production into one workflow, is leveling the playing field for emerging animation hubs in Africa and the Middle East

The importance of multi-tasking

When it comes to actually awarding a contract, Lopez says he looks for service partners that are not only price-competitive but also properly equipped to meet his production needs. "Outsourcing comes into play when we need to find the right balance to continue to deliver great content while at the same time concentrating our efforts on building new brands and starting new projects," he explains.

In the past year, Nelvana has significantly increased its slate of 2-D animated projects and is a proponent of sending its 2-D and CGI series to one facility that can handle the simultaneous production of both animation styles.

Among the studios with this dual capability is Oakville, Canada-based Pipeline Studios. The four-year-old animation shop is facing global competition head-on by offering both 2-D and 3-D animation pipelines. It's since churned out content for US and Canadian powerhouses like Nickelodeon, Hasbro, Discovery Kids and Nelvana.

On the 2-D front, Pipeline offers full-service production from storyboard design, breaking and setup to color and backgrounds and, of course, animation. Like many 2-D outfits, Pipeline uses Toon Boom software to provide fully rendered animated scenes to its clients. "With all the competition out there,

Canadian studios need to invest in the right type of technology," says Juan Lopez, MD of Pipeline Studios. "We offer an efficient production focus because we are competing with Asian prices."

For this reason, full service is also offered in CGI/3-D through Autodesk Maya that includes design, modeling and rigging, layout, animation, lighting and texturing, art direction and high-volume rendering.

Even with sophisticated production processes, Lopez says it's the labor itself that accounts for the majority of budget spend—approximately 80% of the production contract, which typically covers 12 to 16 months' of work.

Scrawl is hoping to marry its Singaporean talent with the lower labor costs of the Chinese market.

According to Cookie Jar's Taylor, animation costs are significantly lower in China than in other Asian regions and North America, with 22 minutes of footage being delivered for between US$25,000 and US$100,000, depending on animation style.

"China is a good place to outsource because it comes with a safe and reliable infrastructure," says Catherine Xu, SVP of Global Digital Creations (GDC), the first CGI animation studio in China and the first to offer local professional animation training programs. The studio, whose recent service productions include American Greetings' *Strawberry Shortcake Berry Bitty Adventures* and live-action/CGI series *Sportlets* for Moonscoop, sees the majority of its work coming from the US, Europe and Australia.

"I think for a service studio to be successful, it's about adopting a Western service mentality. Just because you can be cheap, doesn't mean you shouldn't be manageable," says Xu, adding that her studio's artists were initially trained by experienced Hollywood pros from studios such as Sony Image Works, Disney and DreamWorks.

The CGI studio uses production software like Maya, 3DsMax, Renderman, Mental Ray and Nuke to animate series for rates ranging between US$2,500 and US$8,000 per minute, depending on animation complexity and quality. GDC's prices include the entire scope of CGI production, from asset building to final compositing.

Chinese animation center GDC uses software like AutoDesk Maya, Renderman and Nuke to produce its CGI-animated series, including American Greetings' *Strawberry Shortcake Berry Bitty Adventures*

Keeping up with 3-D

Moving beyond the latest advances in CGI, most service companies are also keeping a close eye on the advance of stereoscopic 3-D animation into the TV space as it migrates from feature films to the small screen. GDC, for example, has a subsidiary that provides digital cinema services, so the company is actively exploring stereoscopic 3-D and has already completed an 85-minute theatrical film for a European client.

Xu says her company is positioned to provide animation for more stereoscopic TV series should the trend take off as predicted. She anticipates regular CGI rates jumping by 12% to 15% to account for the longer production time and more elaborate design elements involved in rendering true 3-D.

Similarly, Dublin, Ireland-based Brown Bag Films is building out its stereoscopic 3-D capabilities and has recently developed two half-hour TV specials for the animation style.

Brown Bag, in fact, is currently building an annex studio that will have a 50-seat stereoscopic screening room, and Cathal Gaffney, co-owner and CEO, says the company has also set up a technology R&D team to craft techniques and software to further enhance the style. "The team was key to us developing our stereoscopic pipeline because we found that there is very little experience in producing stereoscopic 3-D animation outside of the larger feature film studios."

China heating up

Also offering 2-D and CGI capabilities is Singapore-based Scrawl Studios. While CEO Seng Choon Meng says there's a close affinity between Singaporean and North American working styles—which helps foster closer co-production and service contracts—Scrawl's now set on developing its China-based subsidiary Scrawl Suzhou for both service work and local IP development. "On a service level, if you look at the market in China it's competitive, but on a consumption level there is room to grow in terms of kids entertainment and kids IP," says Meng. "China is growing in affluence and parents are keen to spend on kids."

As the first Singapore-based animation company to establish a major production presence in China,

Animation in Education

Bluffton Elementary School, SC, USA

iAcademy, Philippines

From Elementary...

Develop a wide array of skills using animation solutions while tying into Math, Science, History, Geography and Arts learning objectives.

To Higher Education

Prepare students for a career in animation production, empowering them with marketable knowledge, giving access to a worldwide network of users to enhance their job search.

Art and Cross-Discipline curriculums including lesson material for Toon Boom software available.

toonboom.com/edu

While the developments in new technology are exciting, Gaffney says the advances are still countered by challenges that include animators experiencing more eye strain and the re-education of storyboard artists when it comes to accommodating the technology. "Overall it has been a very steep and satisfying learning curve," says Gaffney, admitting that his studio hopes to increase stereoscopic 3-D workloads, but finds there is little market to pay for it at the moment.

CGI further refined

In the meantime, Brown Bag is keeping busy with continued work for London-based Chorion on CGI shows like *Olivia* and *The Octonauts*, as well as *Doc McStuffins* for Disney. And with a large number of preschool productions in particular moving into CGI, Gaffney says the real expense incurred in rendering the style, when compared to 2-D, is in managing its related digital assets.

By nature, CGI remains a more complicated technique that is susceptible to running over schedule and budget if a strict set of systems and procedures are not in place. As a result, Brown Bag turned to IBM a number of years ago to develop a scalable asset-tracking system which has helped manage the large volume of files flowing through its studio.

> **The ability for directors and producers to see the final [animated] product and make changes is now on an overnight basis as compared to a weekly one.**
>
> –Kevin Gillis, CEO Skywriter Media & Entertainment

CGI animation and its costs also remain steadily in the mainframe for producers outsourcing the work. Skywriter's Gillis believes that feature films over the past two to three years have significantly raised the bar in CGI quality and consumer expectations for the medium. And while 2-D animation remains an appropriate style for comedy series targeting more mature audiences, Gillis is betting on more growth for CGI in older-skewing content, matched by a drop in production prices.

(CONTACT)|||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||

[TOON BOOM] www.toonboom.com
[PIPELINE STUDIOS] www.pipelinestudios.com
[SCRAWL STUDIOS] www.scrawlstudios.com
[GDC] www.gdc-world.com
[BROWN BAG FILMS] www.brownbagfilms.com

Magic makers

BY KATE CALDER

A certain alchemy occurs when the right combination of writing and acting talent comes together to elevate a series concept from good to outstanding—but casting that winning spell is trickier than it looks

WRITING

Transitioning from a work-for-hire animation studio to an original series creator requires dedicated in-house talent, at least one great idea and a tenacious sales strategy. Toronto, Canada's Guru Studio managed to do just that for its first production slate, created on the back of a good 10 years of animation experience that included service work on commercials and series, such as Nelvana's *The Backyardigans*. So when Guru's first project out of the gate, 26 x 11-minute preschool toon *Justin Time*, scored a development deal with Canada's Family Channel, the company had everything ready to go—well everything but the scripts. The company's VP of development Mary Bredin then went off in search of a writing team.

"Finding the voice of a show in written form is very challenging," Bredin says. "It's like finding the right designers—it's a key part and it's tricky to bring them in as part of a team."

Cracking the inner circle of top-rated kids series writers took some legwork. Bredin sought out leads from colleagues and contacts in the industry, took suggestions from broadcasters, put the word out with agents and even interviewed brand-new writers looking to get their first big break. As a studio without a hit series under its belt, getting the attention of agents and writers proved difficult at first. And even once she cracked the inner circle, Bredin admits to feeling like finding the right person to fit any one project "is always going to be challenging."

When it came to scripting season one, Guru tried out a handful of episodic writers before finding a core group recruited by an in-house producer, the story editor and the network. Though she's enthusiastic about trying out new writers, Bredin says there's one significant caveat—it takes time to hone that talent.

Voice actor Adam Longworth in the studio laying down a vocal track for Darrall Macqueen's *Pet Squad* (opposite); Guru went on a quest to find just the right writing team for *Justin Time*

"You have to be really patient when you look at a script," says Bredin. With spec scripts, in particular, she takes a hard look at the structure, the word craft and how well the story flows.

While she likes to scout for burgeoning talent herself, Bredin says she prefers to go through agents to negotiate the contracts. "It's better to negotiate with the agent, it removes the writer from the smelly part," she says, adding that it's worth taking the time to really get to know reputable talent agents and their rosters. She feels that the best writers are the ones who also hustle to promote their own work.

The in crowd

Having a rapport with agencies the likes of L.A. heavyweight career management firm The Gotham Group can't hurt.

"Part of what we do everyday is talk to executives in the kids space," says Gotham Group manager Julie Kane-Ritsch, who herself worked at various animation studios before she got into agency life in the mid-1990s. "We have a consistent and ongoing dialogue with studios, so we are able to move quickly."

Helping writers make the transition from hired scribes to content creators is also part of Kane-Ritsch's remit.

UK-based writer Paul Parkes is one such Gotham client dipping his toes into both pools of the scriptwriting process. Having just recently wrapped up work on the pilot for Random House Children's Screen Entertainment's *Fish Head Steve*, Parkes is working on getting his own series off the ground and now finds himself in the position of having to hire writers.

A lot rides on having an in with the tight-knit circle of writers who like to work with one another again and again. And having worked in the industry for 10 years, Parkes already has a handful of candidates he's planning on approaching. He's

also asked some friends in the industry to keep their ears to the ground for him.

"It's a small industry, and after about five or six years you start bumping into the same people," says Parkes, who was in fact recommended to Gotham Group by a friend. Prior to that, with little-to-no credentials, he says he had a hard time getting agents to return his calls. And now that he has Gotham Group on his side, he still takes an active hand in marketing his talents. "I don't think it hurts to knock on the door twice; it shows that I'm quite determined and stubborn and that can't be a bad thing in this industry," says Parkes.

Besides networking, Parkes says he's also open to finding new talent and plans to make use of the writing guilds in UK and North America and put out a call to unpublished writers. "I think it's important to keep bringing new blood into the circle, otherwise you get the same tales regurgitated," he explains.

Dollars and sense

Parkes' long-term goal is to gain a foothold in Hollywood, which, with the help of Gotham Group, will mean breaking into a different and much more competitive writing community. However, co-productions in the kids space are opening up US-based agents to representing international clients like Parkes.

L.A.-based agent Annette van Duren, with a boutique client roster of 16 scribes, represents several Canadian and European writers. She says branching out into the international market is not only required for staffing co-productions, but also necessary in an economy where US license fees are now much lower than they were in the heyday of pre-cable Saturday morning cartoons.

"It's good to have writers who are Canadian, European or Australian, because those are treaty countries and their governments have money available to put into productions," van Duren says.

Like Kane-Ritsch, she also stays in close touch with prodcos and broadcasters to keep on top of upcoming writing gigs and will often get requests from broadcasters for specific talent. As for new writers, van Duren says there is often a try-out stage in which they are hired to write a script and go through a series of interviews to see if they're a fit creatively.

Regardless of the shining credentials a writer may have under his or her belt, dwindling license fees and the struggle to finance shows have left little wiggle room for the writers themselves to negotiate fees based on experience. And payouts for animated kids series aren't protected by the North American writing guilds. So unlike their primetime counterparts, toon writers don't command standard minimums and mandated rate increases. As a result, the rate hasn't

budged in years. One industry executive pegged the standard writing fee for an 11-minute script at US$3,500. So it's not really surprising that most top-level writers redirect their creativity into hatching and pitching their own show concepts.

"I still do work-for-hire if I like the show and it's a fun bunch of people, but I'm more focused on creating, because that's where the money is," says Edward Kay. The Toronto-based writer, and client of van Duren's, has credits on Breakthrough Entertainment's *Jimmy Two Shoes* and *League of Super Evil* from Nerd Corps.

Kay is now embarking on the interviewing process to find writers for *Finding Stuff Out*, a series he co-created with Montreal, Canada-based Apartment 11's Jonathan Finkelstein. Though he tends to gravitate to writers he knows and has worked with, Kay says he'd like to meet new people. So he's been searching out new writers through colleagues, attending writer's guild events, paying attention to the closing credits of existing series and scouring IMDB.com.

Kay says an important aspect for writing kids content, especially animation, is writing visually. And keeping the visuals within budget is a particular trick of the trade that comes with experience. For example, for one pilot on which Kay worked, the writing team wrote double the regular amount of copy per page, which created a great comic pace, but had the animators burning the midnight oil to keep up with the script.

VOICE TALENT

Once the scripts are in place, it's up to the actors or voice talent to really breathe life into the concept. For the zany comic toon *Pet Squad* from London-based Darrall MacQueen, starting production on the series called not only for a dynamic retro-esque visual design, but also a cast of voice actors who could bring the script to the screen with the perfect mix of comedic timing, big expressions and perfectly wacky voices.

"We were looking for an ensemble cast because we record with all the actors in the studio together," says Darrall MacQueen series producer Fiona Robinson. "We needed actors who could play a range of authentic American and UK accents and multiple roles within the series."

Robinson approached agencies, sought recommendations from industry colleagues and consulted with London-based casting specialist and recording studio Tamborine Productions to get a who's who list of voice actors. After a lengthy process that involved auditioning groups of actors together, a cast of four was selected to voice the 100-odd different characters that populate the 52 x 11-minute series.

Puppeteer Jason Hopley helping one of his character creations master a light whip for a scene in *Mr. Meaty*

The finite talent pool

Robinson says having a few actors play multiple voices is not unusual, and though she often puts calls to tender out to agencies, a lot of voice talent is mined from an established local pool of actors with proven experience.

Toronto-based dialogue director Karen Goora at music and casting services firm Grayson Matthews says gravitating towards the same actors is a universal casting dilemma. "People get over-exposed and a lot of the same people do a lot of the work, so you need to try and find new talent and open it up."

Goora, who spent the last several years working in L.A. as a creative director of casting at Disney for series such as *Kim Possible*, *The Replacements* and *Yin Yang Yo!*, regularly sifted through hundreds of first-call submissions from agents. She would then make a shortlist and conduct auditions in-house. Goora and her team would also sample demo reels posted by agents at online voice talent service www.voicebank.net as a means of finding new prospects.

Smaller markets, however, like Toronto where Goora currently directs dialogue, are dramatically different. Currently, she'll take one or two unknown picks from agents, but for the most part she already has an idea of who she wants to see from the minute she reads the script and character descriptions.

Sharp acting ability tops the list of required skills that put a voice actor on Goora's go-to rotation of talent. "If you can't act and lift words off the page to create a character, no amount of vocal gymnastics will get the job done."

For producers new to the scene and casting their first series, Goora says hiring someone to handle the process is key. "It sounds self-serving, but it will be costly because you have to rent a studio, and if you don't know at least the general talent pool, you'll end up wasting a lot of money on studio time to see a lot of the wrong people for the wrong roles," she says. As for talent costs, expect to spend 3% of the overall series budget on acting fees, according to one Canadian voice actor.

> ## If you can't act and lift the words off a page to create a character, no amount of vocal gymnastics will get the job done.
>
> –Karen Goora, dialogue director, Grayson Matthews

Casting kids as kids

One method to that invariably unearths fresh talent is casting child actors. Traditionally animated kid character roles are awarded to adult female actors, who have better comic timing and whose voices don't run the risk of changing mid-season. However, for Darrall MacQueen's Robinson, casting a young person in the prodco's latest preschool series, *Magic Baby*, lent a natural and authentic kid appeal to the role.

The series, co-produced with Dublin, Ireland's Jam Media, stars a real baby who goes on animated adventures that are narrated by his older brother. Robinson and her team listened to numerous demos from children's performing agencies and theater schools, and settled on a six-year-old new to the acting scene who had developed his skills by reciting poetry at school assemblies.

"He had very little experience, but was a very exciting find because he'll deliver a line in a way that would never be expected," says Robinson.

Casting kids as the voices of child characters is a trend lately on the rise, according to Nick Harris, MD and senior engineer at Tamborine. He says the six-year-old lead of *Magic Baby* has been a natural so far, but admits that sometimes the impromptu, unforced delivery that makes kid actors so perfect for parts can also be tricky to manage.

"Sometimes you need them to say things in a particular way to make the story work or to make the lines join together, and trying to get that out of them without making it sound like they are reading is a challenge," says Harris.

PUPPETRY

The funny thing about puppets is that it doesn't take long—whether you're a kid or a, er, fully grown journalist—to completely forget that you're having a conversation with a piece of sculpted foam. At least that's what should happen if a talented puppeteer is wielding the otherwise inanimate object.

Arguably the success of any puppet-based series hinges on the men and women literally behind (or underneath) the characters, and it turns out this rare breed is really part improv actor, part physical comedian and all master technician.

Katrina Walsh, producer at DHX Media in Halifax, worked on recent puppet-centric preschool series *The Mighty Jungle* and says the puppeteers on that set had strong comedic acting skills, but also had technical experience performing on TV sound stages, which is very different from live theater. "The puppeteers each work with a monitor in front of them and are looking at everything in reverse," she says.

Finding the right handful of puppeteers to cast for the series took some networking with the who's who of the puppet pool. It helped that she had the Toronto, Canada-based puppet troup that created the series on-board from the outset. Owned and operated by specialists Jason Hopley and Jamie Shannon,

The Grogs has 20 years of experience in designing, building, producing and performing puppet programs. The founding duo has produced preschool puppet series *Nanalan*, tween-targeted *Mr. Meaty* for Nickelodeon and Disney Playhouse shorts *Ohh, Ahh & You.*

"With a handpicked group of puppeteers and crew members it just gets easier, and we learned something new with every production," says Hopley, who is now developing a few solo puppet projects. For Hopley, the best puppets stay away from acting too saccharine and have very human qualities. "Take Grover—he was insecure and he was a real character with real emotions. But sometimes people go too far with their character and it seems fake," he says.

State-side, Hoboken, New Jersey's Puppet Heap is a one-stop puppet shop that also offers a full-range of puppet services, including creation, design, construction, costuming, testing with an in-house video and photo studio, and performance.

The shop keeps tight-lipped regarding its A-list studio clientele that it supports. Marketing director and fellow puppeteer Jean Marie Keevins, however, willingly shares some tricks of the trade.

Many of the staff are also puppeteers themselves and naturally have an understanding of puppet construction needs, such as the weight issues and engineering that make for great performances. "We're always looking for new techniques and new materials to lighten up the puppet and new ways to manipulate the mouth," she says. The company also has a molding and casting shop to produce props and costumes for the creatures it creates.

Keevins says the market is ripe for puppets right now and has seen a rise in interest not only from kids entertainment players, but also from ad firms and the 30-something demo in general. And when Puppet Heap isn't taking orders, it's driving its own business.

"If there isn't content to be had, we're creating it and putting it out there," says Keevins. So beyond pitching show ideas, the company has made a series of online short puppet films and is planning a move into the toy market. ℕ

Apple's iPad is cracking the apps space wide open for kids content.
And that's just the iPad.

Are you ready?

KidScreen presents…

iKids

February 15, 2011 • Hilton NY

Tied in with KidScreen Summit, iKids is a new one-day event that will help you bridge the gap between your kids entertainment properties and app revenue through better planning, better partners and better execution.

Featuring case studies, expert panels, networking sessions, a global research presentation and Consumer Electronics Show's signature Apps Showdown format, our program will challenge and inspire you to approach your mobile business in new ways.

➡ **Learn more about the platforms, revenue models and consumer behavior**

➡ **See what's been working for kids app pioneers**

➡ **Look ahead to future opportunities you should be laying the groundwork for now**

➡ **Connect with top kids app developers who can transform your IPs for this market**

$695 Early-Bird Rate in effect!
Register now to catch the $200 savings.

ikids.kidscreen.com | jpinto@brunico.com

Engineers set the audible scene at Saucer Sound

Sounding off

BY GARY RUSAK

While the audience might not be consciously aware, music and sound play a central role in just about every series—animated or live action. Beyond the theme song, a show's audio components often serve as its underlying driver, evoking emotion, painting characters and even propelling plot. Producers certainly understand the need for well-chosen music and artfully rendered sound design, and more often than not rely on seasoned service shops to provide the auditory accompaniment that will go a long way in cementing a series' relationship with its audience.

Making music

Every producer surveyed for this piece agreed that the way to get the most effective music composition for a series is to deal with it from the beginning. Typically, while the show bible is still hot off the press, producers choose a composer to craft general themes and musical motifs. Finding the composer best-suited for the job, however, takes a bit of work.

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but when it comes to setting a production's tone and atmosphere, music choice and sound design speak volumes

"Some composers have a real twinkle in their eye for a certain kind of show and others just won't get it," says Ceri Barnes, VP of production at Classic Media in London. "You have to have an idea of what you are looking for to know who can handle it."

The process often leads producers to send out an RFP, as was the case for Cookie Jar Entertainment's boys action toon *Johnny Test*. Toronto, Canada-based Wanted! Sound + Picture secured the deal by delivering a theme and musical motifs that the producers felt were perfect for the series.

"Typically with most shows, it starts off with a theme song," says Earl Torno, a noted composer and music director/producer at Wanted. "Usually we get the bible and then you begin throwing darts." Torno has a roster of about 10 different composers that he draws upon to develop series scores and theme songs.

"I handpick the top three guys. Together we go through the brief, or bible, and we write and write, and in the end we present something to the clients," Torno says. "At that point, it goes back and forth until both parties are happy."

Mark Dyson, a composer for *Bookaboo*, a BAFTA-winning series from London-based prodco Happy Films, tells of a similar process for UK productions. "The producer sends me the book and I like to look at it, take a walk and see what it suggests," he says. "Sometimes the book itself will suggest a musical motif, sometimes it's just a picture in the bible that will set me off—it's not even necessarily in the episode."

While producers usually allow one or two weeks for final composition to be settled upon, the recording occurs only after the filming or animation sequences have been locked and then it's mixed in as the final element.

Want more buyers to screen
your shows at KidScreen Summit?

kidscreen
connect
Screening Suite
has you covered.

350+ kids buyers will use this private screening lounge at the event.
And 1,200 more use the platform year-round online.
Make sure they find your programs there.

Deadline to enter: December 17
connect.kidscreen.com

Need more info or a demo? Contact Lauren Talledo at 416-408-2300 x223 or ltalledo@brunico.com

Saucer Sound handles sound design for Cuppa Coffee projects, like the Brisk commercial campaign that it animated (above), and third-party content

How long is a piece of string?

The amount of music needed and produced for a given series is all subject to the producer's tastes and, of course, budget. "For *Bookaboo*, which is an 11-minute show, I use no less than nine or 10 minutes of music," says Dyson. "The music is underneath the whole thing. I don't tend to just stop it."

For some series, most of the work is put into the theme song and then musical quotes are taken from that theme and placed throughout the episodes. "It really does vary," says Wanted's Torno. "For one 22-minute show sometimes we write 19 whole minutes. For another, like 9 Story Entertainment's animated *Almost Naked Animals*, we only use nine or 10 minutes per episode."

In terms of equipment, again it comes down cost. While some producers are happy to use MIDI or electronic sounds that digitally mimic instruments, others want to spend the extra money to employ real instrumentation.

"I use a lot of live percussion," says Dyson. "If I can put live instruments in the mix, I will. A lot of it comes down to cost, but I think there is a difference that the audience can hear."

In fact, many in the industry have noted that preschool producers, whose shows are often music-led, are moving away from the canned MIDI sounds towards tunes made by traditional instruments.

"You are seeing a lot of fun and sophisticated stuff in preschool TV now," says Barnes, citing New York-based Little Airplane Productions as a leader in real instrumentation. "There are some really good songs and sounds out there and you can tell that kids react to them."

Evolving rights

When a piece of music is composed specifically for a series, its associated revenue is split 50/50 between the publisher and performer. On the other hand, a composer writing under contract for a client will get paid a fee for his time and retain a performance royalty, which is paid out every time the piece of music is played. Publishing revenue in this case has historically belonged to the commissioning producer. However, this particular rights issue is ever-evolving.

"More and more composers are fighting back to obtain more and more of their rights," says Derick Cobden, MD at Vancouver, Canada-based Airwaves Sound Design. "And once producers become aware that there is a revenue stream, they start to want hold on to it." What results is a bit of a tug-of-war over rights.

So, according to Cobden, there is currently no standard deal when it comes to music produced for series, because both producers and composers are recognizing these small royalties, paid every time a piece of music is aired, add up. And as distribution spans the globe, a theme song can become something of a money-maker.

Another evolving rights issue concerns augmenting a series soundtrack with already published, popular songs. Wanted, for example, was in charge of inserting two songs into each episode of Toronto, Canada-based Fresh TV's tween series *Stoked*—referred to as "needle drops" in the industry.

"We had to hunt down original songs from bands and their record companies and music publishers and just start negotiating," says Torno, adding that the cash paid for each piece varied widely. "It really depends on the stature of the band, the publisher and the music label," he says. "It can get very expensive to go that route—and there are no rules at all, they just set a price."

Noises everywhere

A companion to a series' score is sound design, which takes into account all the audible aspects accompanying the visuals. Things that might not be considered important at first blush are actually integral to the final product. Whether it's the creaking of a door or the echo of footstep, getting these little touches right adds a sense of quality to a production. "The ear is less forgiving than the eye," notes Airwaves' Cobden. If something is amiss with the overall sound design, if a gentle rain sounds more like a running faucet for instance, the broadcaster and eventually the audience will notice.

Most sound design is taken on as a part of the post-production process and includes special sound effects, foley (the re-recording of everyday sounds) and the final audio mix that sets sound levels for dialogue, music and incidental noises. With the advent of Dolby 5.1 sound and more intricate home stereo equipment, the process has become increasingly important.

In fact, deciding on what kind of sound design will best fit a production is an important step for any producer. "Sometimes you have to make a decision to go more cartoony with some things, or perhaps more naturalistic depending on the content," says Classic Media's Barnes, who has worked on creating the soundscapes for preschool series *Tinga Tinga Tales* and *Guess with Jess*. "The sound can really change the feel of a series. Children really do react to sound, you just can't overlook it."

Ideally producers should make these types of decisions before production starts with the help of a studio that can inform them of the costs incurred by a specific style of sound design. Most post-production sound studios can handle either end of the spectrum, but as with all areas of production, early and regular communication between the service provider and the supervising producer should be at the forefront—it's the best defence against unexpected cost overruns.

Tech trends

Recognizing a need to expand Cuppa Coffee Studios' service capabilities, president Adam Shaheen recently cut the ribbon on Saucer Sound, a facility adjacent to Toronto, Canada-based Cuppa's HQ. The new shop handles the complete A to Z of sound design for third parties as well as its parentco's original productions.

"The idea was to look at it in terms of what was out there and construct the best possible facility," says Shaheen, adding that the studio services live-action, animation, entertainment and corporate productions.

To construct a top-of-the-line outfit, Shaheen enlisted a Swiss acoustic design team to develop Saucer Sound's 5.1 Mix Studio, a multi-voice booth and control room, SD and HD editing suites, and an extensive foley stage.

"What you don't see is the structural stuff," says Shaheen, explaining that it takes architectural expertise to develop the modern sound studio. "For example, all the walls are floating on rubber pads and are two-feet thick. It also uses a specific dry wall manufactured with certain air gaps for acoustics—it's all very exact."

While the studio cost about US$500,000 to construct, Shaheen insists that the real value in all the post-production work, including sound design, is in finding the right people. "Getting the gear is the easy part," he says. "Getting the engineers that know what to do with it is more challenging."

Speaking of gear, the predominant sound design software is Pro Tools—a digital audio station platform for Mac and PCs manufactured by Avid Technology—whose license fees are coming down in price. However, pricey multi-track mixing boards are a must, as some animated productions require more than 100 different audio channels to deliver the standard of sound design now expected.

"A lot of producers and directors now are coming from a place where they have been playing videogames their whole lives," says Saucer's sound design,

To dub or not to dub

Producing a clean dub that translates to different markets has become a necessity for international sales, but are lower license fees making it worth the effort?

Language and sound reversioning technology has become so smooth that it's difficult for audiences to tell whether or not a show has been dubbed. But a high-quality dub doesn't come cheaply and many a producer/distributor has had to decide whether it's worth spending the cash up front.

In fact, Derick Cobden, MD of Airwaves Sound Design in Vancouver, Canada, says cost pressures are making the dubbing business very challenging at the moment. "A lot of producers are having concerns about covering the costs of the dub with a license fee," he says, bluntly.

Ranging between US$5,000 and US$10,000 per 22 minutes of footage, dubbing's become something of a Catch-22, particularly for producers of non-English content.

The idea is to use the money from international presales to foot the cost of dubbing into other languages to get more sales, but Cobden says many are holding off producing an English version as license fees aren't what they used to be. However, he notes, it's hard to sell a series without the dub in the first place.

Quality also costs more. "If you do it for English first, your product is going to be better quality," Cobden says. "But it's a different process. It's more labor intensive and the price goes up to between US$16,000 and US$25,000 per episode."

recording and remix engineer Mike Rowland. "They expect many layers of sound and effects. It's changed the game."

And like many aspects of post-production, producers are trying to stretch budgets without diminishing the finished product. "It's pretty much all about smaller budgets and faster turnarounds now," Rowland says. "When we started producing in 5.1 years ago, it was for a premium, but then people started just giving it away so it became standard, despite more deliverables being involved."

The old rule of thumb for pricing sound design was to allocate between 5% and 8% of the series' budget to the process. However, Codben says that number is dropping as sound design often gets overlooked when producers are planning their budgets. "I think the problem is that sound design is at the end of the pipeline," he says. "By that time, almost all the money has been spent. People are lowering budgets and you can see the difference in the quality of the productions."

(CONTACT)||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||

(AIRWAVES SOUND DESIGN) www.airwavessound.com
(SAUCER SOUND) www.saucersound.com
(WANTED! SOUND + PICTURE) www.wantedsp.com

Wanted! Sound +Picture has dubbed the past five seasons of *Beyblade* using "a really sophisticated karaoke system"

Taking the plunge

If a producer decides to go ahead with the dub, a script adapter is hired to translate the script into English or another chosen language. Adaptation entails changing aspects of the script that are culturally specific, including names of characters and venues, as well as translating direct dialogue and voiceovers.

"Adaptation is a tough process," says Dan Kuntz, a sound design and dialogue editor for Toronto, Canada-based post-production studio Wanted! Sound + Picture.

Currently, Kuntz is working on dubbing season five of Nelvana's *Beyblade* from its original Japanese to English to air on YTV in Canada and Cartoon Network US. He stresses that a thorough and exact script adaptation is necessary for a decent dub.

"It's really the key to a good dubbing job," he says. "A well-adapted script takes the meaning and phrases and adapts them to our culture, along with storylines and language. It also makes allowance for the individual rhythm and cadence of each language."

New voice talent is then cast, and the next step is to head into the recording studio, which typically requires an eight- to 10-hour session to lay down vocal tracks. An additonal day is needed to input the session into the system, followed by a half day of editing and a day each for pre-mix and final mix. However, as with all post-production work time estimates vary because no two dubbing jobs are alike.

As for tech trends, dubbing houses have traditionally used the rythmo band technique to reversion already completed content. The name refers to the process of transcribing dialogue onto clear 35 mm film with the addition of directions regarding things like syllable length or where to insert sighs or laughs. The film is then projected in the studio and synchronized with the picture, letting the voice talent read from the screen.

The process of preparing the rythmo-band is antiquated and takes a lot of time, so a few years back Wanted purchased a TM System to update the operation. "It's basically a really sophisticated karaoke system," says Kuntz. "The talent sees the picture and a scroll highlights the exact moment the dialogue should be spoken."

The script has to be entered into the system, at which point the engineer works to make sure that the syllables match the "flaps," a.k.a. the openings/closings of a character's mouth. It is prohibitively expensive to digitally correct flaps in post, so it's up to the vocal director, the engineers and the voice talent to make sure everything syncs—even if that means adding adjectives or minor emotive phrases like a chuckle or an exclamation to the audio recording. **GR**

kidsc
SUM
February 15-18, 201
More business...Mo

Now
4 days!

Get in th

Hot new highlights

Channel Team Spotlights
Core teams behind some of the world's most influential kids networks will use the Summit's biggest stage to map out their content strategies and pitching process for you.

Lunching With...
Because relationships are everything, this new event feature gives you a chance to spend some quality time getting to know the buyers who can greenlight your projects. It could just be the best meal you ever have!

KidScreen Awards Gala
We're opening up our high-profile presentation event and after-party to all KidScreen Summit delegates on the evening of Thursday, February 17. Come out and celebrate the best content and broadcasters in the business.

Full-Day Master Classes*
We're very excited to present three intensive training days designed to help you master the fine arts of planning and producing cross-platform properties (Transmedia Bootcamp), developing winning formats for kids (Format Doctoring) and understanding and engaging kid viewers worldwide (Audience Awareness).

Trend Forensics with SillyBandz
Listen in as the company behind the year's biggest kids fashion craze talks about how to ride the white-hot trend wave as long as possible through strategic product innovation, licensing and marketing.

MARQUEE
Taylor Drew
DISTRIBUTION

PLATINUM - SCREENING SUITE

dhx media

PLATINUM - DELEGATES LOUNGE

PLATINUM - DIGITAL MEDIA

nickelodeon

SABAN Brands LLC

The year's biggest gather
power-players, KidScreen Sur
afford to miss if you're in the bu

Register today | sur

creen
MMIT ™

1 • Hilton NY, New York

re learning...More fun!

e game!

Popular staples

Speed Pitching—BETTER FORMAT!
Now featuring longer pitches, these short-and-snappy sessions distill the pitching process down to bare essentials, with 10 kids buyers each hosting as many 10-minute one-on-one pitch meetings as we can pack into an hour.

Digital Media Day
This future-focused track will kick off with a debate exploring the merits and challenges of transmedia production, as well as a first-of-its-kind research presentation looking at how kids actually move between platforms to engage with transmedia properties.

30 Minutes With...
These intimate and interactive sessions feature top kids content buyers talking candidly about their future plans and priorities. More than 25 in-demand acquisitions and development execs are already on-board to outline what they're looking for in 2011 and beyond.

Kid Insight Track
This popular research showcase always delivers on its promise to help you stay ahead of upcoming kid culture trends and shifts in audience and consumer behavior. Topping the slate in 2011: The exclusive unveiling of Nickelodeon's "State of Play" study.

Little Airplane's Lift-Off Party
Come out and feel the love at Little Airplane's annual pre-Summit bash, which coincides next year with Valentine's Day on Monday, February 14. Invites for this high-energy industry gathering go out to registered delegates soon.

ring of kids entertainment
mmit is the one event you can't
usiness of entertaining children.

mmit.kidscreen.com

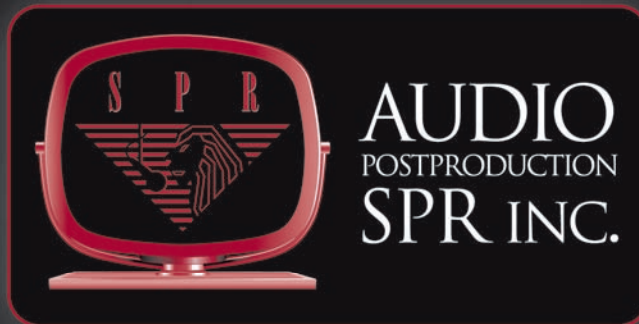GOLD

LANYARDS

MARKETING
PARTNER

CONTENT
PARTNER

SHAW
rocket
Fund
Supporting quality television for kids

MARATHON
MEDIA
PART OF ZODIAK MEDIA GROUP

blueprint
PUBLIC RELATIONS

insight
kids

ONE VERSION
ONE STUDIO
ALL FRENCH TERRITORIES
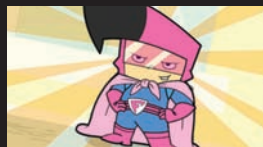
AUDIO POSTPRODUCTION SPR INC.

INNOVATIVE
CREATIVE APPROACH
DEDICATED STAFF
PERSONALIZED SERVICE
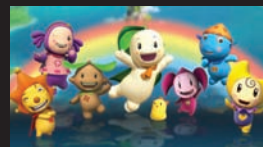
WELCOME TO DUBBING — SIMPLIFIED

LEAGUE OF SUPER EVIL

CAPTAIN FLAMINGO

TURBO DOGS

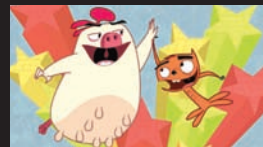**NOONBORY & THE SUPER SEVEN**

18 TO LIFE

ERKY PERKY

OVERRULED !
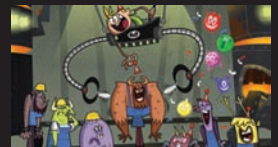Photo Credit: Christos Kalohoridis, courtesy of Shaftesbury Films.

BAKUGAN
© Sega Toys / Spin Master / Bakugan 2 Project
All rights reserved.

SPLICED !
© 2008-2009 Nelvana Limited.
All rights reserved.

JIMMY TWO-SHOES

Quality often comes through in the details, and while budgets may be getting tighter, producers can't afford to overlook the effect well-executed post-production services have on the end product

Finishing touches

BY GARY RUSAK

DIGITAL EFFECTS

Seemingly big-budget post-production effects, particularly those rendered with CGI, are no longer out of reach for kids TV productions thanks to time-saving, cost-cutting technology introduced over the past few years. That said, most effects executed for kids shows don't involve the insertion of digitally crafted alien species and instead often involve polishing footage like erasing a shadow cast from a misplaced boom mic or altering weather conditions. Either way, adding digital effects are most often serviced by a third-party studio.

Clean-up costs

Boutique post-production facility The Giggle Group that services the UK production community is noted as one of the region's leading post-production effects houses. The company specializes in adding CGI effects with industry-standard Final Cut Pro software and Mac suites, performing service work for a number of prodcos and the BBC.

Located near Bristol, post house The Giggle Group (above) serves a growing animation community, while Happy Films' *Bookaboo* benefited from a higher-than-average digital effects spend

"We do anything from explosions and rig removal to adding snow or erasing it," says MD Steve Garratt. "In terms of animation, we are located slightly north of Bristol and there is a large animation production community growing around there, so we service that."

While there are plenty of variables that determine how much of the production budget gets allocated to digital effects, Garratt says his studio typically charges on a per-hour basis. The more intricate the effect, the more time it will take, which bumps up the final cost of those finishing touches.

Carrying out standard effects runs about US$750 a day at Giggle, while the daily rate to craft high-def CGI effects can range between US$1,050 and US$1,500.

Garratt says that in the last few years producers have gained a better grasp of the digital effects process and are getting better at keeping costs down. "There used to be a mentality that you could just 'fix it in post' without considering how much that would actually cost," he says. "It has taken some people quite a while to understand the processes involved, but it's getting better."

Lucy Goodman, MD of UK-based Happy Films and creator of live-action puppetry series *Bookaboo*, is one producer who understands that high-quality digital effects have to be a budgetary consideration from the very beginning. In fact, the digital effects for the first season of the show actually accounted for 20% of the budget—more than double the typical amount.

"The big spend was a gamble," Goodman says. "But it truly sets the tone and feel and gives the show its individuality and style." London-based studio Blue-zoo, which also produces its own series, was brought on-board to carry out *Bookaboo*'s digital effects.

"We work closely with a team headed by Oli Hyatt," Goodman says. "It's an extremely creative company, which is why we chose to work with Blue-zoo." And the cost for effects on the second season also dropped significantly.

"The biggest thing for *Bookaboo* was building the assets and getting everything ready to go," says Hyatt, creative director of Blue-zoo. "It was up-front intensive."

In fact, downward pressure on cost continues to be the driving trend in the digital effects realm. "Producers want more and more and they want it cheaper,"

Hyatt continues. He adds that the growing number of skilled technicians in the industry—with a new crop of talent coming out of centers like London, New York and L.A. every year—is also driving prices down.

"There are more and more animators coming out of the UK," Hyatt says. "It's bigger than it has ever been and the software licenses are cheaper, so producers are expecting everything to cost less."

However, Hyatt stresses that quality work still commands a premium. "Most of our money goes into finding the very best talent," he says. "You can have all the software, but you need the people behind it."

The downside of cutting corners, Hyatt explains, is the creation of CGI effects that come off as "lifeless" and "flat" on-screen. But like every aspect of post-production, all parties stress the importance of pre-planning to reduce costs and of making sure there are open channels of communication between all members of the production team.

"Lucy had a really clear vision from the beginning," says Hyatt about working on Bookaboo. "It was nice. We'd rather have someone striving for an end-goal than the producer not being clear about what they want to see."

EDITING

Taking multiple camera shots or animated takes and combining them into a seamless whole is the domain of the editor. The practice has come a long way over the last few years with the advent of digital technology. While editors used to slave over machines, physically splicing film together, the digital revolution has taken the occupation into the non-linear realm and transformed the process into something as seemingly simple as cutting and pasting digital fragments together. While the technology has sped up the process of editing, the ability to perform it well remains an art. While anyone can buy Final Cut Pro and load it onto a home computer, it won't inevitably result in broadcast-ready content. As with all the post-production areas, quality and craftsmanship are the hallmarks of the best editing facilities and it is good word-of-mouth that breeds a meritocracy that separates the top-end houses from the rest. Typically, a producer should look to earmark around 5% of the total budget to the process. Of course, this figure can encompass many variables and is subject to expand or contract.

A creative process

John Marley, creative director of London-based Archie Productions, is currently pulling together the CiTV commissioned live-action series *Cool Stuff Collective* and uses a careful selection process when deciding who will edit a series.

London-based Blue-zoo's digital effects team gets down to work

"The first consideration for us isn't value for the money," Marley says. "We really consider the caliber of individual editors and their sensitivity to audience needs." He explains that the editing process is as creative as any, in that it ties together all the elements of a series.

"For our series, the editors really have to have a sense of humor that can be translated to kids," Marley explains. "They have to have a childlike sensibility because comic timing is as rich in the editing process as it is in the production."

Happy Films' Goodman agrees. "You have to work closely with the editors," she says. "We like to get it done locally because there is constant back-and-forth. If we sent it abroad I don't think there would be the same seamlessness."

Goodman says she has an editing suite in her offices, and after an initial pass, moves the content on to a service house where she can draw upon the expertise of seasoned vets.

And like digital effects, editing needs to be planned for in pre-production or the project will likely run into budgetary problems and cost overruns. "Our editor is involved in the pre-production work," says Goodman. "That is the best way to work out the post-production flow."

"Pre-planning is something you'd better do," agrees Charlotte Murphy, post-production manager for MTV Post, based in London. MTV Post handles numerous projects, including corporate and commercial clients as well in-house productions. "It's all about checking beforehand and making sure you know that what you want to do is what you are going to end up with. There is only so much that can be done in the editing process," she adds.

And as with most post-production services, Murphy says editing is getting a smaller share of the pie as producers continue to trim their costs. "The budgets are definitely smaller," she says. "There seems to be less money left for editing, probably because it's the last stop."

Murphy adds that the post work is typically billed on a per-hour basis, but it's hard to determine how much it costs to cut together a 22-minute episode because there are far too many variables.

"It's different from show to show," she says. "Some shows just have a lot less editing to do depending on the shooting ratio."

To get a rough idea of per-day costs, Twigworth, UK-based Giggle charges roughly US$890 a for a two-editor suite and estimates that larger centers would charge between 15% and 20% more for the same service. ◪

The Ben 10 MouthOff app speaks to the series' digitally savvy fan base
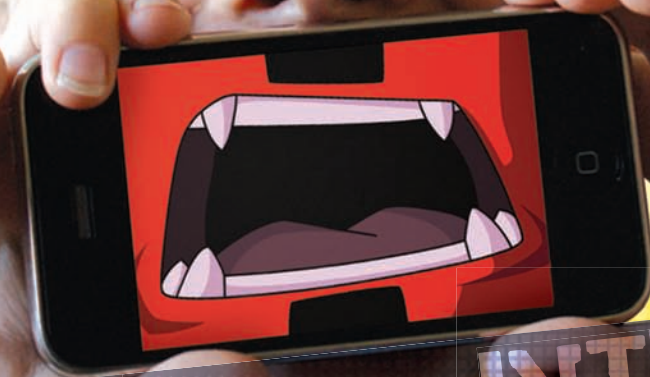
Stretching
the small screen

INTERACTIVE

BY WENDY GOLDMAN GETZLER

Digital extensions are a must-have for kids TV properties, and engaging partners to chart an effective interactive strategy is now a must-do for producers

Turns out, mouthing off can get you places—or at least a service contract with Cartoon Network, as recently discovered by Matt Miller and his team at London, England-based digital firm ustwo. The company pitched its original *MouthOff* iPhone app to Cartoon Network UK as a means of further immersing *Ben 10* fans in the world of the series. Tapping into the property's extraterrestrial DNA, the app released in September lets kids watch their mouths morph into those of Ben 10's host of alien characters, and it's been successful enough to spawn two more themed games, including *Ben 10: Alien Force DNA Scanner*, which launched last month across European markets.

"We represent a move away from a service that's entirely paid by the hour to one that creates ideas, owns IP and approaches brands with ideas," says Miller, co-founder of the six-year-old digital house that's rooted in user-interface work for TV and mobile.

As smartphone and internet usage among kids continues to grow, service providers like ustwo are working with prodcos to conceive innovative digital strategies and products that run parallel to, and reach beyond, TV content. And just as TV producers are extending their brands to include new digital portals like mobile and web-based games, interactive service companies are expanding the scope of

their offerings and developing products that push the envelope for what's accessible to kids.

In the case of the *DNA Scanner*, based on the latest Ben 10 iteration *Alien Force*, ustwo worked with CN UK's digital team to manipulate real assets from the show into a user-friendly experience that turns kids' personal photos into full-bodied monsters from the series.

"They become part of the characters really," says Miller of the iPhone app, which boasts a user interface specifically designed with the series' six- to 10-year-old audience in mind.

Miller believes that such iPhone apps, which he says can be developed for US$50,000 and up, are powerful tools for the digital brand extension of a TV series, if developed and promoted correctly. For example, when the commercial for the original ustwo *MouthOff* app (upon which the Ben 10 version was based) aired for the first time in the UK, 1,600 downloads followed, with roughly 3,000 more occurring over the next three days. "Companies need to put the effort into it and then the payoffs can be absolutely huge," Miller says.

Part of the payoff of good work is landing more work. Ustwo is currently peddling its creative portfolio to other large studios like UK-based RDF Media, with which it's exploring interactive strategies for

brands like preschool-targeted Waybuloo. The company has already worked with RDF on developing prototype experiences, like a game or iPhone app, to help pitch new TV series and properties.

"There's no point in pitching just a TV series without showing some digital output," contends Miller.

In a time when mobile phone ownership among US kids ages 11 to 14 has reached 70% (seeing a 33% growth in five years), and eight- to 18-year olds are spending an average of 1.5 hours per day using the internet for recreational use, Miller's statement is not a stretch.

Matching audience to platform

Of course, digital output reaches many forms and audiences.

"I'm seeing producers chasing hardware platforms that aren't necessarily appropriate for their audiences," says Ryan Creighton, founder of Toronto,

US$10,000 apiece to develop over a two- to three-week period, depending on complexity and scope. But even the most basic of online games requires a level of strategy and original creativity behind it, which Creighton says interactive vendors of his kind are increasingly able to provide.

"[In the past], a lot of interactive projects were seen as a necessary evil. A fries-with-that tack-on," says Creighton. "Once monetization models become more stable and more ad dollars move from TV to web, more weight will continue to be given to the interactive extension of TV IP."

Brainstorming partners

Large-scale interactive companies have already taken a holistic approach to their digital services that span multiple platforms. And HIT Entertainment's recent Angelina Ballerina augmented reality website and accompanying iPhone app is one example of how prodcos are using these one-stop shops to cover wide swaths of digital ground.

In giving its girl-skewing animated series a digital twist, HIT teamed with New York-based agency Mammalfish, which then had sister company Whistlebox handle the website's augmented reality features, while its smartphone app development division SmartFish created the Angelina mobile app.

Heroic Interactive's *Spy Alliance: Connor Undercover* web game (left) immerses fans of the TV series into the world of its characters, and Angelina Ballerina's website (right) puts girls literally into the picture through augmented reality tech implemented by New York-based agency Mammalfish and its subsidiary Whistlebox

Canada-based Untold Entertainment, an interactive service vendor specializing in games and app development for preschoolers through to tweens.

"If you have a 10-minute show that airs on a provincial station and want to build a Nintendo Wii game, you are punching above your weight class," he argues. Instead, Creighton, who's done service work for Canadian prodcos like Sinking Ship and marblemedia, recommends that small-scale TV productions warrant the creation of no-frills Flash-based web games that cost roughly between US$5,000 and

The final web product, which marked HIT's first foray into augmented reality, let the brand's target audience of three- to seven-year-olds use Whistlebox's webcam-enabled tech to record and see themselves dance on the Angelina Ballerina site.

"We wanted to break ground on this kids site," says HIT's SVP of global brand management and digital media Natasha Fishman, who found experiential gaming to be the right conduit for moving Angelina Ballerina online, and Mammalfish the best company to facilitate that transition. Fishman says her team provided the digital company with a series of strategic objectives and full brand download of the show's key attributes, which allowed Mammalfish to come back with ideas for the site's overall concept.

"I think it's very much a partnership of brainstorming," says Fishman. "Everyone can come back with a piece to develop, but how you expand the brand is really a two-way discussion. A good partner is one who brings a point of view and offers further ways to execute it."

HIT will also be joining the ranks of studios that are outsourcing eBook projects based on their brands. Fishman says Thomas and Friends and Angelina will be exploring this evolving medium that involves a different level of technological know-how than gaming apps.

The next wave of storytelling

With US tablet sales predicted to hit 19.5 million units this year, it's no surprise that the majority of HIT's 2011 digital initiatives are focused on driving story-inspired interactive apps as well as eBooks for digital readers like the Amazon Kindle and Barnes & Noble's Nook and Nook Color.

As the largest provider of book apps to Apple's App Store, New York-based Scrollmotion is one service company that specializes in different forms of digital media development and works with publishers and entertainment companies to leverage libraries of content into apps for touch-screen platforms. The company is currently set to launch three more Sesame Street book apps for Apple devices, topping off a library of roughly 12,000 apps produced. Behind the staggering number is a staff of about 35 working out of New York and San Diego.

"People should invest in building an app once and expect it'll work everywhere. You shouldn't have to re-invent the wheel every time a new touch screen heads to market," says Sara Berliner, VP of content at ScrollMotion and head of the company's kids division. (Scrollmotion has worked with The Jim Henson Company, Classic Media, Chorion and Little Airplane Productions, to name a few.)

Berliner also says that eBook app development in the kids space is gearing up to include highly interactive features like integrated video, 360-degree rotations, context-based hotspots and animation for additional content, which ScrollMotion intends to use on apps built for educational brands like Sesame Street.

Setting a digital strategy

Steve Viner, CEO of Brisbane, Australia-based Liquid Creative Studios, believes that the concept of marrying learning while playing and tapping into the educational value of a television show can and should be used to create new digital experiences and revenue opportunities. Liquid Interactive, the company's subsidiary that provides services like website design, user-interface design, online games, iPhone apps, social media strategy and database development, has provided digital content for entertainment companies like Disney, Mattel, Warner Bros. and the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

What Producers Want
The Three Cs

Despite the complexity of digital offerings currently available to them, many TV producers agree that the criteria for **choosing the right service company** is rather straightforward:

Creative capacity—What is the company capable of producing and does its ideas add value to the brand's mandate?

Compatibility—Will the teams working on the project from each side mesh?

Cost—Is it in line with market prices?

"Studios are increasingly seeking digital concepts for properties at the earliest stages of planning," says Viner. "They are trying to adapt to the changing behavior of viewers and recognize the need for cross-media executions."

Regardless of whether the digital experience precedes or coincides with the television series, Viner says digital strategies should revolve around extending the show's basic narrative elements. "It's necessary to develop the digital experience alongside the development of the TV show. They go hand-in-hand, with each element fully connected to the other."

Spy Alliance: Connor Undercover, from Canada's Heroic Interactive, is one example of a web-based game that runs parallel to the Heroic/Shaftesbury Films series upon which it's based. Launching this month on the Spy Alliance website, the social game allows users to collect points and train as a spy alongside the tween series' protagonist Connor Heath and a host of other characters. Despite the game being offered to users for free at the moment, like many developers, Heroic has built a monetization model into the game that will eventually allow for it to capitalize on Facebook's lucrative virtual goods market.

The *Spy Alliance* social game and eight accompanying mini-games, which were developed internally for roughly US$300,000, are the latest projects out of the gates for Heroic Interactive, led by Karen Lee Hall, who founded the division as an off-shoot of Heroic Film Company in 2008. The robust and rapidly evolving opportunities within the digital arena have recently led Hall to expand the business from an in-house agency to a full-service provider of digital entertainment content and strategy for the web, encompassing Flash games, websites and original video content.

"In the new transmedia way of expressing a brand, the lines are blurring and it's really exciting to contemplate all that can be done," Hall says of her company opening its doors to the global service market. "The secret is to build a truly organic extension. You can't apply one template across all platforms."

CONTACT |||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||

[HEROIC INTERACTIVE] www.heroicinteractive.com

[LIQUID CREATIVE STUDIOS] www.liquidcreativestudios.com

[MAMMALFISH] www.mammalfish.com

[SCROLLMOTION] www.scrollmotion.com

[UNTOLD ENTERTAINMENT] www.untoldentertainment.com

[USTWO] www.ustwo.co.uk

natpe.
CONTENT FIRST

"our philosophy is: bring the best creatives, the best storytellers, the best producers and be flexible with them."

DAVID ZASLAV

NATPE 2011, January 24-26, 2011 Fontainebleau Resort, Miami Beach

www.natpemarket.com

Use promo code N11KS for $750 registration rate (does not include membership)

Self service

BY KATE CALDER

Distributors gear up for a digital future

As a crucial part of the pipeline, distributors bridge the gap between creative production houses and broadcasters that transmit content worldwide. And managing the process of distribution in an industry that is straddling analogue and digital has put the pressure on distributors to ramp up their digital capabilities, while remaining accommodating and flexible.

Traditionally, when it came time for distributors to, well, physically distribute screeners they'd rely on tape replication and delivery houses. However, as catalogues are migrating to digital formats, that step is becoming increasingly less necessary when it comes to broadcaster outreach.

Indie distribution heavyweights in the kids space, such as Cake Entertainment and the newly minted eOne Family, have dramatically reduced courier costs and customs headaches by making online screening available to broadcasters. eOne's head of international sales and co-productions Muriel Thomas says besides screening capabilities, the company's customized file vault also serves as a means of providing electronic assets to the broadcasters for marketing purposes.

As for Cake, the distributor is starting to see a slight increase in demand for digital file delivery, and last year it partnered up with third-party digital media company JCA-TV, based in London, to create a delivery portal that allows for the transmission of digital content directly to iTunes, broadcasters and other partners.

"Now that it's been set up by JCA, what it takes for us to deliver materials is a one-step process," says Cake COO and MD Ed Galton.

Galton says that what pays right now is having as much flexibility as possible to accommodate the individual preferences of each buyer, which range from delivery via analogue materials to web portal to USB card.

And some distributors are forging this route on their own, sans third-party help. London-based Parthenon Entertainment, for one, turned what started as an internal initiative to digitally transmit files between different departments into an external operation. So about a year ago, the company began digitizing its back-catalogue and has converted roughly 20% of its 12,000 hours of content into digital format. For Parthenon, the encoding coincided perfectly with an iTunes deal where two of the distributor's most popular series, *Jakers* and *Roman Mysteries*, are launching this month.

To make the transition, says director of technical services, Martin Reekie, Parthenon has expanded its technical team and trained up staff to cover more roles within the digital domain, including digitizing and managing the language versions of each program, as well as audio streams, artwork and scripts.

Like Parthenon, DHX Media in Toronto, Canada is in the throes of converting its entire catalogue to digital. DHX's SVP of distribution Josh Scherba says a significant decrease in the cost of encoding equipment over the last year made for a good entry point into the process. The transition has had an immediate benefit in reducing the cost of shipping demo tapes around the world. Scherba says the company's FedEx bill has been slashed by a good 60%. As well as time and costs savings, his sales people can see when clients actually view the content, instead of waiting and trusting that a shipment reached its destination and made it into the hands of the buyer.

On the business side, since last January DHX has delivered about 10 fully digital contracts out of its 150 or so distribution deals forged with both linear broadcasters and VOD platforms. Scherba says that the bandwidth isn't necessarily available worldwide to support

Parthenon is encoding shows such as *Roman Mysteries*, which is set to launch on iTunes

Sydney, Australia-based Beyond Distribution's manger of operations Jim Harper has been investigating digital systems for the last year and says the digital world is gradually becoming a reality. Most of Beyond's digitizing is for the purpose of screening services, but the distributor is starting to occasionally deliver programs digitally for broadcast, internet download by satellite or hard drive.

Harper doesn't doubt that the business will transition entirely to digital at some point; many of his clients have yet to make the switch from 4:3 broadcasts, let alone taking digital delivery of programs. In the meantime, he says digital remains just one of many delivery formats with which Beyond deals.

"Digital files suffer as many or more technical problems," says Harper, adding that creating new formats can involve outputting the file to videotape and then re-digitizing. There are increased costs associated with carrying more formats, and the potential for digital file corruption leads to uncertainty about ditching tape masters.

Current obstacles aside, even Harper sees a digital distribution pipeline coming. "The day may well come when there will be no need for fulfillment personnel. Sales people will be able to organize digital delivery with the click of a button, and the sent files will include all the associated non-video materials such as stills, scripts and music cue sheets as metadata." ⦿

online file transfer, so in some cases that digital distribution meant actually shipping a hard drive. However, sending small hard drives versus large boxes of tapes brings down delivery costs and virtually eliminates the common obstacle of customs restrictions.

"Countries like Russia and Argentina are traditionally difficult countries for couriers to get materials cleared through customs," says Scherba. He admits, however, that full digital deliveries are few and far between. The majority of broadcasters have large expensive analogue systems already in place that would be too costly at this point to switch out for digital.

[CONTACT]||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||

[BEYOND DISTRIBUTION] www.beyond.com.au
[CAKE ENTERTAINMENT] www.cakeentertainment.com
[DHX MEDIA] www.dhxmedia.com
[EONE FAMILY] www.eonefamily.com
[PARTHENON ENTERTAINMENT] www.parthenonentertainment.com

The Tricon family just got a little younger!